

Emergency Responder

WASHINGTON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION



WASHINGTON MILITARY DEPARTMENT

September-October 2003

Heavy rains cause floods, slides across Washington

A surge of moisture-laden storms from the Pacific led to mid-October flooding and a presidential disaster request for 15 Washington counties.

A series of very wet Pacific storms surged into the state starting in the third week of October. In dramatic fashion, a record summer dry spell was broken with inches of rainfall, especially on the Olympic Peninsula and in northwest Washington.

After a brief break for the weekend of October 17-18, the moist weather systems returned with record-setting rainfall on Oct. 20. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport set a calendar day rainfall record of 4.86 inches, breaking the previous record set in 1959 by more than one inch.

Huge amounts of rain fell throughout most of western Washington. Twenty-four hour rainfall totals included 6.52 inches in Bremerton, 5.93 inches for Shelton and 4.53 inches for Hoquiam.

By the evening of Oct. 20, flood warnings had been issued for 10 Washington rivers. The greatest threat of damage predicted in the Skagit River Basin where the river was forecast to be 12 feet over flood stage in Concrete by the morning of Oct. 21.

Washington's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) initially activated at 6:30 a.m. Oct. 17 because of flood problems in Clallam, Skagit and Whatcom counties. Lt. Gov. Brad Owen, acting on behalf of Gov. Gary Locke who was out of state, issued a



Skagit River waters inundate the town of Hamilton in central Skagit County after drenching rains pushed the river to more than 14 feet above flood stage at Concrete on Oct. 21. (EMD photo by Ken Parrish)

Gov. Locke seeks federal disaster declaration for floods

Gov. Gary Locke's Oct. 29 request for a 15-county federal disaster declaration is the state's first since 2001.

If approved, it would be the 28th time that Washington has received a federal disaster declaration for flooding.

The governor made the request Oct. 29 for the counties of Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, Kitsap, Mason and Clallam and the contiguous counties of Chelan, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, King, Okanogan, Pierce, San Juan, and Thurston counties.

"There has been widespread flooding damage to homes, businesses, roads and public buildings in our state," said Locke at an Oct. 29 press conference. "I urge the president to act quickly. We must begin providing federal aid as soon as possible to the thousands of people who have suffered from these floods."

Besides damages to homes and residences, the governor noted that there has been "significant damage to the agricultural community, including aqua-farming operations, as well as damage to several community water systems and many county roads and federal highways."

Gov. Locke named Diane Offord as state coordinating officer for the disaster request. She is the manager of the Emergency Management Division's Response and Recovery Unit and served as state coordinating officer for the 2001 Nisqually Earthquake recovery program.

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Urban area assessment, strategy due Nov. 30

Washington Emergency Management Division staff will submit by Nov. 30 a security assessment and strategy for the city of Seattle and King, Pierce and Snohomish counties to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The end of November deadline is one of the major requirements that Washington must meet to spend the \$18.1 million in urban areas security initiative grant program money assigned by DHS from the 2003 federal budget.

Washington's urban areas security assessment and strategy are to be used to guide the allocation of grant funds by Dec. 30. Dianna Staley, EMD's coordinator of the urban area security grant program, said the urban area security program can underwrite training, planning, exercises, equipment purchases, critical infrastructure protection, and administration and management.

Lower than expected equipment bids will allow the state to spend another \$268,000 to fill requirements that local jurisdictions had listed for equipment purchases under the 2002 State Domestic Preparedness Program, according to Bob Isaman, coordinator of EMD's homeland security equipment purchasing program. The 2002 program had assigned \$5.9 million for equipment purchases.

The training portion of the 2003 State Homeland Security Grant Program will focus on the establishment of on-line chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) awareness training.

The Washington State Patrol Academy, Fire Training Academy, Criminal Justice Training Center and the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges each will receive \$25,000 to set up CBRNE awareness training in the state.

The state will utilize \$354,000 to establish an on-line CBRNE awareness level training package. Another \$100,000 will be available to the existing training academies, community and technical colleges and the Washington State Hospital Association to connect to the on-line training system.

EMD and 29 other local jurisdictions in Washington were unsuccessful applicants for emergency operation center improvements under the Federal Emergency Management Agency's 2002 Homeland Security supplemental funding grants. Grants totaling \$73 million were awarded to 19 jurisdictions nationwide.

Gov. Locke seeks federal disaster declaration for floods

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The governor requested the federal government to initially approve assistance from the Individuals and Households Program (IHP), which is for families and individuals, and the Hazard Mitigation Program, which uses a percentage of disaster assistance funds to promote mitigation projects in local jurisdictions.

Locke asked that the IHP program include crisis counseling assistance and training, disaster unemployment assistance, U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loans, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency loans to farmers, ranchers and related businesses.

After the floodwaters recede, the governor said additional surveys of public infrastructure damage would be conducted. The results of these surveys will determine whether the state amends the disaster request to include the Public Assistance Program, which aids governments in repairing damage to public infrastructure.

EMAC undergoes test from Hurricane Isabel

Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD) planned to have a startup exercise to begin its one-year tour as national coordinator for the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Instead, Hurricane Isabel gave EMD a real test.

EMD took over as EMAC national coordinator from the state of Arkansas on Sept. 6. The coordination role involves matching requests for emergency workers and equipment with resources available from among the compact's 48 member states, two territories and the District of Columbia.

The state of Arkansas had planned to give Washington a test exercise to help it prepare for its national coordination job. But Hurricane Isabel changed the plans.

Gathering strength as it proceeded slowly on a track towards the U.S. mid-Atlantic coastline, Isabel attracted the full attention of EMD's standing EMAC A Team by Sept. 10. East Coast news media contacted EMD on Sept. 12 to ask about how EMAC would help states where national guard forces had been depleted by Iraqi Freedom deployments.

On Sept. 15, the EMD's standing coordination team began working on assistance requests from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the state of North Carolina. EMD had coordinated by Sept. 16 the dispatch of a three-member Kentucky team to North Carolina and a two-member Florida team to the FEMA national headquarters in Washington, D.C.

As the mid-Atlantic states hunkered down from Isabel's rain and winds, additional requests flowed into EMD for specialists in logistics, debris management, swift water rescue, entomology, disaster recovery programs and public information. By Sept. 18, the EMAC compact would deploy more than 150 persons into the stricken area.

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Heavy rains trigger floods, slides across Washington

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proclamation of emergency for the three counties at 12:15 p.m. Oct. 17, leading to the activation of the Washington National Guard and to a Phase III full activation of the state emergency operations center.

Under the Oct. 17 proclamation, Whatcom County was sent two Washington National Guard trucks and four personnel along with 50,000 sandbags.

Although the state EOC scaled back to a Phase II activation Oct. 18, the renewed onslaught of rain on Oct. 20 led to a re-activation of the EOC to Phase II Enhanced Level at 10:45 a.m. and to a full Phase III by mid-day.

By 6 p.m. Oct. 21, the state actions had sent 50 Washington State Patrol troopers to assist the Skagit County Sheriff, dispatched 20 vehicles and 50 personnel from the Washington National Guard to assist flood fight operations, supplied three jet boats from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to Skagit County for flood fight operations, sent sandbags to Mason and Kitsap counties, and coordinated Civil Air Patrol photography flights over flooded areas.

Thousands Evacuated

Rising rivers and streams cut a swath of damage in several western Washington counties. Roads and highways in several counties were flooded or washed out, an estimated 3,400 persons were evacuated from homes and residents, record flood levels were reported on the Skagit River at Concrete and at Arlington on the Stillaquish River, thousands of volunteers built a wall of between 50,000 to 75,000 sandbags to save the city of Mount Vernon from the raging Skagit, and residential areas of Seattle and Tacoma battled urban stream flooding.

Chelan County reported on Oct. 22 that its commissioners had declared an emergency because floods and slides had damaged

homes and cabins in the Stehekin Valley at the head of Lake Chelan.

Gov. Locke extended his proclamation of emergency on Oct. 22 to include Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason and Snohomish counties and conducted an extensive air and ground tour of flood damaged-areas of Snohomish and Skagit counties on the following day.

EMD directed counties to assemble damage assessments and coordinated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to form four teams of local, state and federal officials to look at flood damage in seven western Washington counties.

Completing the seven-county sample in three days, the teams reported a total of 112 homes with major damage, 207 homes with minor damage and 33 homes destroyed. Their findings were incorporated into a federal disaster request that Gov. Locke signed on Oct. 29.

DOT Damage Tallied

The governor added Grays Harbor and Chelan counties to the state's emergency proclamation on Oct. 29 and included the state Department of Transportation's (DOT) request for Federal Highways Administration disaster declaration for roads and highways in Chelan, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Mason, Okanogan, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties. The DOT estimated the floods and slides had caused damage totaling \$9.4 million to state highways and city and county roads.

The state EOC returned to Phase I normal operations at 5 p.m. Oct. 29 after coordinating and responding to 18 mission and resource requests, including five Washington National Guard missions to support flood response operations.

Even as the EMD ended emergency operations, the division's staff continued recovery operations and worked on plans to open a possible disaster field office in the Everett area.

Clallam receives federal communications grant

A federal grant of \$5.7 million will be the catalyst for a Clallam County demonstration project to link the communications systems of local, state and federal law enforcement, emergency medical and fire service agencies.

Clallam County was one of 17 jurisdictions nationally to be named Sept. 25 as a recipient of an interoperability communications grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The grants are for demonstration projects that explore uses of equipment and technologies to increase interoperability among law enforcement, emergency medical and fire service communities.

The grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services will be matched with another \$1.4 million from the county, state and other non-federal partners.

John Pennington, regional FEMA director, said Clallam County "had engaged over 40 local, state, tribal and federal partners, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to collaborate on an advanced communications network with microwave and fiber optic cable to connect the entire Olympic Peninsula."

Glen Woodbury, Washington Emergency Management Division director, noted that the demonstration project will help link together fire services, law enforcement and emergency services of Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, Thurston and Grays Harbor.

Don Miller, telecommunications section supervisor in EMD's Response and Recovery Unit, said the federal grant, which was awarded in late September, requires the demonstration project to be operational in 12 months.

He said the project will require additional equipment at local jurisdictions, the project and mandate the Washington State Patrol to build or upgrade several microwave sites.

The 2003 wildfire season one state's warmest and driest

Despite an extremely warm and dry summer, Washington was probably lucky to have avoided major losses of property and homes during 2003. That's the view of Greg Sinnett, chief meteorologist for the state Department of Natural Resources,

"It will probably go down on the Eastside (of the Cascade Mountains) as the warmest, driest, and highest fire danger season ever," he said. Forest fuel moisture levels in eastern Washington stayed below the minimum values of the last 25 years for the entire four-month fire season.

While there were major fires this year in Washington's back country and wilderness areas, Sinnett said the fire season could have been a lot worse.

He said the elimination of slash burning in commercial forestlands and the lack of big lightning storms were major reasons why Washington avoided an overwhelming number of large fires.

Early October rains probably ended the fire season for western Washington, but eastern Washington's fire season could hang on until November, Sinnett said. He added that the long-range weather forecast for the remainder of 2003 called for equal chances of normal, above normal or below normal rainfall in western Washington with a slightly greater chance of above normal precipitation for eastern Washington.

Meanwhile, the state's Fire Services Resource Mobilization Plan was used in September for the sixth time in 2003.

On Sept. 6, the state Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activated to Phase II Operations for the Needle Fire in Okanogan County. At the time of the EOC activation, the fire had burned 6,700 acres and threatened 200 structures. By Sept. 7, the fire had grown to 10,000 acres and had forced local authorities to order a level three evacuation for 50 to 75 residences in the area. The U.S. Forest Service responded by sending a National Type One Incident Team for the fire.

Under the State Fire Services Resource Mobilization Plan, the Washington State Patrol's Fire Protection Bureau coordinated the dispatch of 46 firefighters and 15 engines and tenders from Okanogan, Grant, Douglas and Chelan counties to assist local firefighters.

The EOC returned to Phase I Normal Operations when the fire mobilization resources were demobilized at 10 a.m. Sept. 8. Although structures were saved, the Needle Fire continued to burn in more inaccessible areas of the Okanogan National Forest, blackening 21,000 acres by mid October. Federal officials reported firefighting costs totaled nearly \$11 million.

EMD earthquake brochure wins WSSPC award

Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD) won its first award as overall winner for excellence in mitigation from the Western States Seismic Policy Conference (WSSPC). The award was part of WSSPC's Awards in Excellence 2003 presentations at its annual meeting in September.

The award honors EMD's Earthquake Public Education Program that featured the publication of the "Nisqually Earthquake 6.8" brochure, which was prepared under the direction of Barbara Thurman, EMD's public education program manager.

WSSPC said the brochure was "a very attractive product, very comprehensive and yet very digestible and is designed to more easily bring greater earthquake awareness and preparedness to Washington State."

The brochure marked "the first time Washington has covered all major topics, to include all groups, in one booklet. This is a single booklet that covers everything necessary for earthquake safety and addresses every audience from children to seniors, as well as homes, businesses, schools, tribes, and the general public."

Personnel

Gary Herschberger was named manager of the analysis and plans section in EMD's Mitigation, Analysis and Plans Unit on Oct. 20. He previously served in the U.S. Army's Western Regional Medical Command, based at Madigan Army Medical Center near Tacoma.

EMAC gets test

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Even though Washington had been the compact's standing A Team for less than a week, everything seemed to go smoothly in the Hurricane Isabel deployments, said Dr. Terry Egan, chair of EMAC's Executive Task Force and manager of EMD's Mitigation, Analysis and Plans Unit.

Egan added that EMD used the Hurricane Isabel emergency to develop a process to send local county and city specialists from the state of Washington to other compact states.



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The Washington Emergency Management Division, including the State Emergency Operations Center, is located in Building 20 on Camp Murray, located at exit 122 on Interstate 5 south of Tacoma, Washington.